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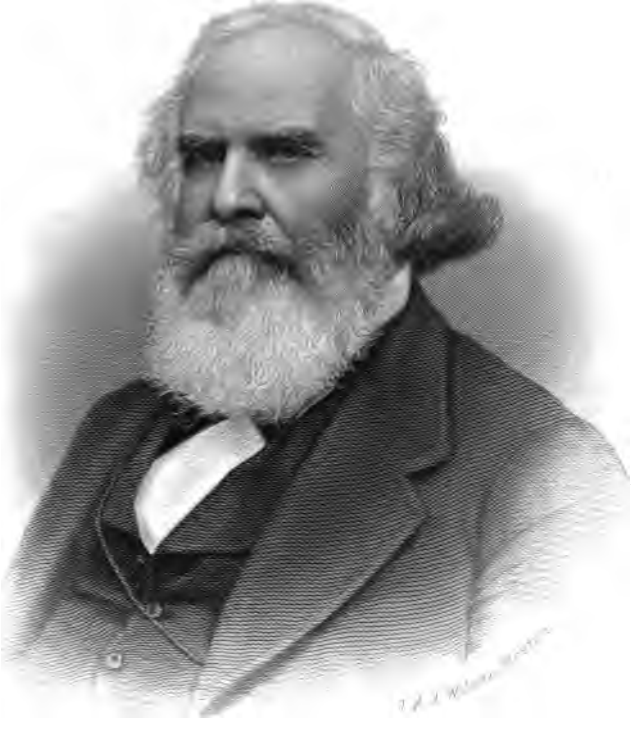

John Langdon Sibley.

MEMOIR

OF

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

BY

ANDREW P. PEABODY.

[Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, May, 1886.]

CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN WILSON AND SON.
University Press.
1886.

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MEMOIR.

THE name *Sibley* is supposed to be compounded of *sib*, which denotes *kindred* and also *peace*, and *lea*, which means *field*. *Peace-field* is, therefore, not an improbable signification; and, like many English surnames, it may have originated in some incident of local history of which there remains no other memorial. The arms of the family, according to Burke, are "Per pale azure and gules a griffin passant between three crescents argent." The name is found in records of several counties in England as far back as the thirteenth century. The first person of the name who is known to have come to America was John Sybley, who arrived at Salem in 1629, and became a citizen of Charlestown. Richard, the ancestor of the subject of this memoir, is supposed to have been the son of John. In the fourth generation from Richard was Jonathan, who was born in Hopkinton, New Hampshire, in 1773, studied medicine with Dr. Carrigain, of Concord, New Hampshire, in his time a man of high and extended reputation, received in 1799 the earliest diploma given by the New Hampshire Medical Society, and subsequently became a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society. In the autumn of 1799 he settled in Union, in the then District of Maine, a town at that time of less than six hundred inhabitants, and was the first, and for nearly forty years the only, physician resident there. In 1803 he married Persis Morse, of Sherburne, Massachusetts, who had two brothers, already residents of Union. She was born in 1772, and died in 1847.

Dr. Sibley had a practice more extensive than lucrative, his patients being scattered over a large and very sparsely settled

rural district. While successful and justly prized as a physician, he was favorably known as an occasional contributor to the principal medical journal in Boston. He occupied a prominent place in the life of the little community that grew up around him, held for many years a commission as Justice of the Peace under the government, successively, of Massachusetts and of Maine, and took a leading part in all enterprises for the general good. He was in every respect a man of exemplary character, and is especially remembered for his inflexible integrity. As a father he was affectionate and self-sacrificing, yet at the same time a rigid disciplinarian of the earlier type, and especially strenuous in exacting of his sons the maximum of study and of school-work. His wife was intelligent, well educated, kind and genial in her temperament, gentle and tender in her domestic relations, and capable of supplying to her children what might have been deficient in her husband's sterner mould.

Our late associate and munificent benefactor, the eldest child of Jonathan and Persis (Morse) Sibley, was born at Union, Dec. 29, 1804. His name indicates his father's political creed. John Langdon was, not without reason, the most popular man in the anti-Federalist or Republican party in New England; and the preponderance of that party in the District of Maine, while Federalism, though moribund, still had the ascendency in Massachusetts, was not the least among the inducements for the people of Maine to seek a separate State government. That Dr. Sibley should have named his oldest child for a political leader, and his second, William Cullen, for an eminent Scotch physician, is of some interest, as showing him to have been a man whose sympathies transcended his very limited sphere of active duty, and who hoped for his sons a larger life than his own, — in fine, whose ambition for them merged the instincts of kinship, which oftener than not give name, especially to a first-born.

Dr. Sibley must have been his son's principal educator till he was fifteen years of age. The only schools in Union were district schools, kept but for a small part of the year, and if we may judge from their cost, of a very low grade of their kind. We find that while more than once the town voted to refund the school-tax, on certificate that an equal amount had been expended — probably in some other town — in tuition

"by a master or mistress . . . duly qualified as the law requires," a petition of Dr. Sibley "to have his proportion of the school-money, and apply it to schooling his own children in his own way," met with no favor. The inference is that his children received the whole or the greater part of their instruction from their parents.

On the Doctor's rare visits to Boston the stage-coach, in which passengers had leisure to inspect and talk about every object on the way, had taken him through Exeter; and his attention had been drawn to the old Academy edifice, then the most ample and stately educational structure on the road, though to a later generation unattractive but for the precious memories that hallowed it. On inquiry he ascertained that the Academy had a charitable foundation on which deserving students received free tuition, with a weekly allowance sufficient to defray the cost of board and lodging, — a foundation which has on its records some of the most distinguished and honored names of the dead and the living. With his limited means of subsistence, aid of this kind alone could enable Dr. Sibley to realize his earnest wishes in behalf of his son John, who was accordingly sent to Exeter in 1819, and remained there till the summer of 1821. Two years were then sufficient to fit a boy for college; not that the requirements for admission were so very much less — in Greek and Latin they were greater — than now, but vacations were short, athletic and social recreations few, and study was the student's chief occupation, instead of being, as it is now to a deplorable extent, a collateral pursuit, so that two years of school-work were fully equivalent to three at the present time; and students enter college at a later age now, not so much because they have learned more, but because they have spent more years often in learning less. Young Sibley must have maintained a blameless reputation and a high standard of scholarship at Exeter, else he would have been dropped from the foundation, which from the first has never given a foothold to youth who could not or would not do it honor.

He entered Harvard College in 1821. He took at once and maintained throughout his course a high rank as a scholar, was rigidly faithful in all college exercises and duties, and received honorable appointments at the exhibitions of the Junior and Senior years and at his graduation. At the same time he

supported himself, with hardly any aid from his father, and with very small assistance from the beneficiary funds of the College, which then amounted in their principal to less than their present annual income. He was of necessity very economical; and so were the great majority of his fellow students, whose entire annual expenses were more than met by less than what a student of the present day might regard as an inadequate allowance of pocket-money. We suppose that he must have kept school in one or more of his winter vacations; for it was only the very few rich students who did not resort to this among other means of subsistence. We are quite sure that at one time he gave instruction in sacred music, in which he was, if not an adept, as well versed as the teachers of his day. His is well remembered by his coevals as among the leading voices in the college choir, which was then renowned for the quality of its musical service, the organist having been a man of acknowledged genius, while Sibley's classmate Brigham, as a vocalist, as those think who used to hear him, can never have had a superior, seldom an equal. Among other employments, Sibley served for his first year as President's Freshman, his duty being to deliver messages on college business from the President to officers and members of the College. There were other services, such as monitorships, by which students were enabled to meet a part of their college expenses; and we have no doubt that Sibley filled some such place during his three remaining years. As early as his Sophomore year, if not earlier, he began to work in the Library, undoubtedly with a view to the compensation, though very small, but with the conscious and manifest aptitude which determined the course of his subsequent life.

On graduating he received an appointment as Assistant Librarian, on a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a year, which was half the salary of his principal. The office was discontinued after one year, on the appointment of a Librarian who, with twice his predecessor's salary, was expected to devote his whole time to his official duty. Mr. Sibley had then been for a year a member of the Divinity School, in which he completed his course in 1828, having shown all due diligence as a student, and at the same time supported himself, with scanty aid from a meagre beneficiary fund.

On leaving the Divinity School he entered on the active duties of the ministry, and in May, 1829, was ordained at

Stow, Massachusetts, as colleague pastor with Rev. Jonathan Newell, who was then very aged and infirm, and died during the following year. Mr. Sibley as a parish minister won the warm regard and affection of the families under his charge; and among his visitors during his last illness were younger members of some of those families, with whom his pastorate had been a cherished tradition from their parents or grandparents. He was assiduous in all offices of sympathy and kindness, and had an instinctive discernment of the occasions on which such offices were needed or desired, so that his was always a welcome presence in the homes of his people, while they saw in him a pattern of the Christian virtues which he inculcated from the pulpit. In 1833 he resigned his pastorate, and seldom appeared in the pulpit afterward. The reasons for this course were numerous rather than individually strong. While embodying Christianity in his life, he was not specially interested in the critical study of its records, which was then, more than now, the habit of the profession. Then, too, he did not write with ease and fluency on subjects not connected with history or biography. At the same time he had a home-longing for Cambridge and the Library, from which he was removed by a half-day's journey or more. The lack of family relations and ties also made his change of condition all the easier, and may have turned the scale in favor of new plans and pursuits.

He entered on several publishing enterprises, the chief of which was the "American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge," conducted in connection with the Boston Bewick Company, which supplied it with wood-engravings in the best style of the art as then practised, and not without substantial worth by the higher standard of our time. Of this monthly journal, which was published for three years, Mr. Sibley was for most of the time the principal editor, and so far as there were losses to be incurred, the chief proprietor, though, if there were profits, they went elsewhere. This magazine was designed to occupy a place like that of the "London Penny Magazine." It was, in fact, a non-alphabetical encyclopedia of history, biography, zoölogy, architecture, music, and popular science, containing in each number a medley of information of transient importance, with a large amount of matter of permanent value, while the copious pictorial illustrations were of a

didactic worth far exceeding their artistic merit. Its editorship required and manifests strenuous and wisely directed industry in the collection, choice, and arrangement of a vast variety of materials. There seems no reason why it should have failed, had there been bestowed upon its circulation a skilled labor commensurate with that employed in editing it. But in operations of this sort Mr. Sibley, whose rule for life was, "Owe no man anything," deemed himself happy in losing no more than the economies of previous years enabled him to pay. At the same time he acquired a knowledge of the relations of the author and the publisher to the press, an experience in proof-reading, and a familiarity with the typographic art, which he subsequently found of inestimable value.

Mr. Sibley, on leaving Stow, took a room in Divinity Hall, which he occupied till his marriage. He rendered valuable aid in the Library so far as other employments permitted, but not officially till 1841, when his previous office of Assistant Librarian was revived on the removal of the Library from Harvard to Gore Hall. This office he retained till 1856, when he succeeded Dr. Harris as Librarian-in-chief, — a charge which he resigned, on account of age and infirmity, in 1877, still, however, retaining his place in the Catalogue with the prefix of "Emeritus." He thus had thirty-six years of continuous active service in the Library; and during the whole of that time his was a service of vigilant, earnest, and intense activity, in its kind and direction, as we believe, unequalled. When he was appointed, a librarian was regarded chiefly as a custodian of the material interests of the library. His chief duty was to preserve the books from loss and injury, and to employ all available means for their increase. He was not expected to afford encouragement or direction in their use. Each function had its fitting time. When libraries were small, the range of subjects of inquiry limited, and the standard authorities within reach in every department few and well-defined, the chief necessity was that books should be kept safe and multiplied; and it is due in great part to the faithful guardians and indefatigable purveyors of an earlier generation that librarians of the more modern type are so richly furnished for the work in which they are employing learning, judgment, and even genius of a high order, in extending and enhancing the beneficent service of the libraries under their charge.

During Mr. Sibley's administration, and when not directly, almost always indirectly through his agency, the Library was quadrupled in the titles in its catalogue and in its annual income available for the purchase of books. He seemed Argus-eyed in the discernment of sources of supply, and equally alert in discovering the hiding-places of old books and pamphlets and in laying claim to fresh issues from the press. Collections that had long lain neglected in garrets and lumber-rooms were carefully examined, and often with rich "finds." Even junk-shops were ransacked and dealers in paper-stock waylaid; and not infrequently the only known copies of documents of great historical value were rescued at the very threshold of the paper-mill. At the same time many publishers were made to understand that gift-copies of whatever they printed were due to the College, and the same obligation was successfully urged on not a few authors, whether alumni or elsewhere educated. Visitors also were so hospitably received, and persons who needed to make temporary use of the Library were so courteously treated, as often to elicit a donation of books as an expression of gratitude. Several of the largest gifts and bequests of money to the Library were the result of Mr. Sibley's immediate effort or influence; others, of his endeavors to keep this special need of the College prominently in view before its graduates and benefactors. In addition to his general care for the Library, there were several departments in which he was at great pains to obtain complete collections. Thus he never failed somehow to procure every town history that came to his knowledge. As to the War of the Rebellion, also, he spared no efforts in bringing together books, pamphlets, loose sheets and cuttings, — in fine, whatever could be of avail for the future historian of the war.

Mr. Sibley's industry in behalf of the College was by no means confined to his official duties. He edited ten Triennial Catalogues, commencing with that of 1842. For his first issue he corrected many dates which had before been erroneously given, ascertained dates — especially of honorary degrees from other colleges — which had been omitted, and supplied middle names in full, — a very arduous work, yet practicable, inasmuch as middle names had come into common use within the memory of men then living. In the edition of 1845 he inserted, for the first time, the dates of the deaths of graduates,

requiring an amount of research and correspondence which hardly any other man would have had the courage to undertake or the perseverance to carry through. Meanwhile, making use of some interleaved catalogues which came into his hands, he distributed such catalogues among persons on whose vigilance and accuracy he could rely, so that he might have not only the death-record of those who died, but notice of such offices and honors as were to be inserted to the credit of those still living; while he kept himself daily conversant with the journals, reports, and documents of every kind that could furnish materials for his use. In later editions there was an "appeal to graduates and others," for detailed information, under specified heads, concerning "any graduate who may ever have lived in the towns where they reside." The successive editions show, also, such progressive improvement in the arrangement of their contents and in the details of typography as to place Mr. Sibley's last catalogue in contrast rather than in comparison with those published prior to his editorship. It may well be doubted whether in a record of that kind there has ever been attained a more nearly entire elimination of error, or a smaller proportion of omissions of what, if known, might have claimed insertion.

From 1850 to 1870 Mr. Sibley also edited the Annual College Catalogue, — a less severe, but by no means an easy task for one who meant that the work should be wholly free from omission, mistake, and misprint, which was his successful aim.

In connection with these labors, we may not unfitly name Mr. Sibley's pamphlet entitled "Notices of the Triennial and Annual Catalogues of Harvard University, with a Reprint of the Catalogues of 1674, 1682, and 1700" (Boston, 1865, 8vo, pp. 67). This little book is full of matter of interest to Harvard graduates, and comprises incidentally an account of the various methods and agencies by which the author had been enabled to make his own work so eminently thorough and trustworthy. His only error was in printing a very small number of copies, instead of depending on the *esprit de corps* of Harvard graduates for an extended sale. We are glad that the substance of this work has its permanent place in the Proceedings of our Society.

Joseph Palmer, M.D., (H. U. 1820,) had, not without large aid from Mr. Sibley, published annually at the Commencement

season a Necrology of the graduates of Harvard College, with biographical notices. In 1870 he was too much enfeebled by what proved to be fatal illness to perform this labor; and Mr. Sibley took it in charge, issuing a complete list of the deceased graduates of each academic year from 1870 to 1885, inclusive, with such salient dates and facts in each life-record as had been entered in his copious memoranda or came in any way to his knowledge. Dr. Palmer, in the last year of his life, collected and published in an octavo volume his annual series. We hope that the like may be done with the sixteen years' record furnished by Mr. Sibley, which would preserve many names, dates, and facts that ought not to be lost from memory.

While he kept his room at Divinity Hall, his expenses were incredibly small, not because he was penurious, but because he had been trained and for a large part of his life compelled to live on very little, and his wants had always been within his means. To the day of his death what were necessaries to most men were to him superfluities neither needed nor desired. But no sooner had he the scanty salary of an assistant-librarian than he found use for the surplus income which his economy created in aiding the poor students around him by gifts, and by loans without security and often never repaid; while there was probably no one of his beneficiaries that would have been willing to live as frugally as he himself lived.

In 1860 his father died, leaving to him, his only surviving child, the savings of a long life of strenuous and self-denying industry, amounting in the whole to less than five thousand dollars. Of the disposal which he made of this inheritance we can best tell in his own words. We will give in full his letters to the Principals, Trustees, and Treasurer of Phillips Exeter Academy, barely breaking the series to record the one event in his life most essential to his happiness and well-being. We publish these letters as a chapter of autobiography, for in all their details they are eminently characteristic of the writer. It ought to be said that at the time of his last donation his whole property was less than the entire sum that he had given to the Academy, so that, while he would have submitted to the utmost straitness before he would have claimed any portion of the income of his donation, it was the dictate of a wise discretion for him to retain a contingent claim upon it.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
NOV. 26, 1860.

GIDEON LANE SOULE, LL.D.,
Principal of Phillips Exeter Academy.

SIR, — The last will and testament of my father, Dr. Jonathan Sibley, who was born at Hopkinton, N. H., Jan. 4, 1773, and died at Union, Me., Oct. 16, 1860, contains the following item: "1. I give and devise to the Trustees of the Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, N. H., the sum of one hundred dollars, to be applied by them in any manner which they shall deem expedient for the benefit of said Seminary; and this bequest I make in grateful remembrance of the favors which my son, John Langdon Sibley, has received at that institution."

It gives me pleasure, in accordance with his wishes, to send you one hundred dollars. I also add another hundred dollars, which I wish to be considered as also given by him. If agreeable to the Trustees, it will be gratifying to me to have the income laid out for the purchase of books for the charity scholars, some of whom when I attended the Academy were so straitened in their circumstances that it was almost impossible for them to raise money for that purpose; but I do not wish any one to have any part of it if he uses opium, ardent spirits, or tobacco in any form, except when prescribed by a physician. If my suggestions are adopted, I wish to have pasted in the inside of the first cover of each book a label, of which I send several copies, and an electrotype for printing others.

Respectfully yours,
JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., NOV. 18, 1861.

GIDEON L. SOULE, LL.D.,
Principal of Phillips Exeter Academy.

SIR, — Herewith I place in the hands of the Trustees one hundred dollars, to be added to the two hundred dollars given about a year ago to constitute the Sibley Book Fund of Phillips Exeter Academy. I wish it to be considered as given by my late father, and the income to be applied as if the sum a year ago had been *three* hundred instead of two hundred dollars.

Respectfully yours,
JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., NOV. 25, 1862.

To the Trustees of Phillips Exeter Academy:

GENTLEMEN, — For several years there has been in my will an item leaving a legacy to the institution through whose charity I was supported while fitting for college. But the liability to loss of property,

particularly by literary men, and the litigation which might attend the settling of the estate of one who like myself has no near kindred, lead me, with certain reservations and restrictions, to anticipate my purpose. Accordingly, reserving to myself the right to all the income, demandable by my written order or by that of my guardian, — if the kind Providence which has always so blessed me as to make me feel humbled at my unworthiness, shall ever render one necessary, — I, John Langdon Sibley, Librarian of Harvard College, now place in your hands, and by these presents quitclaim in trust to you, the Trustees of Phillips Exeter Academy, and to your successors in office, forever, the following property, viz.: —

Twenty shares in Limerick Bank, at Rockland, Me., at 70 . .	$1,400
Twenty shares in Medomak Bank, at Waldoboro', Me., at 100 .	2,000
Cash	1,100
Total nominally	$4,500

This property I give to constitute a fund by the name of the Sibley Charity Fund, with the following restrictions, to be modified hereafter if I think proper: The fund shall always be kept separate from every other fund, and all other funds. The accounts shall be kept in separate books. The accounts of the Sibley Book Fund, however, may be kept in the same books, if thought advisable, but the two funds must be kept distinct. If at my death any part of the income of the Sibley Charity Fund remains in the hands of the Trustees, it shall be added to the principal. The Sibley Charity Fund shall be allowed to accumulate till it amounts to ten thousand dollars. After it amounts to ten thousand dollars, one fourth part of the income, as nearly as it can be done conveniently, shall be constantly added to the principal. The other portion of the income shall be appropriated to the support of students "of poverty and merit." If, however, the fund shall ever amount to one hundred thousand dollars, on a specie basis, the entire income, if it be thought advisable, may be appropriated, so long as the principal amounts to this sum; but if the principal is reduced below this sum, only the proportion above specified can be appropriated till the one hundred thousand dollars as principal is restored. And it is my wish that the Christian, middle, and surname of every recipient of the charity, the place, with the day, month, and year of his birth, his parents' names in full, the sums he receives, with their respective dates, and the period for which he receives the assistance, may be carefully recorded. I wish that this gift, though I inherited the property without any restrictions or conditions, may be considered as coming from my father, Dr. Jonathan Sibley, who was born at Hopkinton, in New Hampshire, 4 January, 1773, and died at Union, in Maine, 16 October, 1860, — inasmuch as I received the whole of it from him. It has in

my eyes a sacredness which I could not attach to any property acquired by my own exertions. And knowing the sympathy which he always felt for students "of poverty and merit," and his partiality to the institution which took under its fostering care his son when he first went from the domestic fireside, I do not think I could appropriate it to any purpose which would be more gratifying to him if he were living. And as this property was acquired by the *most rigid economy* both of my father and of my mother, Persis (Morse) Sibley, through a long life, and for many years of it by a *self-denial* which it would not be expedient for me to illustrate by details, it is confidently expected that it will be vigilantly guarded by the Trustees; that in investing it the first consideration will be its safety, the second the income it will be likely to yield; that no person will be allowed to receive any part of the income if he uses ardent spirits or tobacco in any form, or opium, except by the written prescription of a regularly educated physician; and that no recipient will spend it or be allowed to spend it or any part of it in any way inconsistent with the *rigid economy* and *self-denial* through which *alone* the property *could* have been accumulated by my parents, who always lamented that they were prevented by poverty in early life from being better educated. And though, with the exception of reserving to myself the income during my life, I do not make the terms of this gift CONDITIONS, I rely on the honor of the Trustees to observe my wishes as sacredly as if the violation of them would lead to a forfeiture of the gift. And though I have no near kindred, yet if by adoption or by marriage I should hereafter form new relations, and any or all of the persons who in consequence thereof would naturally rely on me either for support or for education, are deserving and should need the income, or part of it, after my decease, I desire and authorize the Trustees to make appropriations for the purpose so long as the necessity therefor continues.

Given under my hand and seal this twenty-fifth day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two.

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY. SEAL.

Witness:
JAMES W. HARRIS.
THOMAS J. KIERNAN.

On May 20, 1866, Mr. Sibley was married to Charlotte Augusta Langdon Cook, daughter of Samuel Cook, a Boston merchant. Miss Cook was then living in Somerville, on the border of Cambridge; and he took up his residence in her house for a few months till she purchased the house on Phillips

Place, Cambridge, which was his home for the remainder of his life. It hardly needs to be said that the remaining letters of this series are a sufficient proof that Mrs. Sibley was in full sympathy with her husband in his plans of beneficence, as in his whole remaining life-work.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
March 4, 1868.

GIDEON L. SOULE, LL.D.,
Principal of Phillips Exeter Academy.

DEAR SIR, — Herewith I send to the Treasurer of Phillips Exeter Academy five thousand dollars, in six per cent bonds of the Agricultural Branch Railroad, with accrued interest since Jan. 1, 1868, for the purpose of increasing the Sibley Charity Fund. What I have already given for this object I think about equivalent to five thousand dollars, beginning to yield interest when the first payment was made in November, 1862. I wish the present gift to be held by the Trustees on the same terms and provisions and with the same limitations in every respect as if it had been part of that donation; and I request that the whole of the income continue to be added to the principal during my lifetime, unless I give different directions. Having thus alienated my right to this property, I wish to call the attention of the Trustees to the statements near the end of my communication in November, 1862, and to express my desire, if my wife, Charlotte Augusta Langdon (Cook) Sibley, who concurs with me in making this donation, should survive me, that she may by a written order over her own signature, draw for her own use as much of the income of the whole Sibley Charity Fund as she may wish. None of these remarks are applicable to the Sibley Book Fund. Please to confine the knowledge of this communication to the Trustees. The bonds are $1,000 each, numbered 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, coupons payable semiannually, Jan. 1 and July 1.

Respectfully yours,

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
April 21, 1868.

S. C. BUZELL, Esq.,
Treasurer of Phillips Exeter Academy.

DEAR SIR, — As a comment on your letter of March 12, I think the least objectionable course for the general funds of the Academy, as well as for the $5,000 in bonds which I sent to you in my letter of 4 March, to be added to the Sibley Charity Fund, will be to credit the bonds at their par value. If, when they come to maturity, or when it

may be thought advisable to dispose of them, they should be below par, deduct the depreciation; or if above par, add the excess to the Sibley Charity Fund. In the mean time add for accumulation whatever is realized from the coupons, which at present, after the United States revenue tax is deducted, amounts to $142.50 semi-annually.

My former gifts to remain as they are.

Respectfully yours,

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

CAMBRIDGE, Jan. 6, 1874.

ALBERT C. PERKINS, Esq.,
Principal of P. E. Academy.

DEAR SIR, — In reply to yours of 28 January, perhaps it will be well to fix the time at 1 January, 1875. If, on or before that day, $25,000 shall be raised and paid into the Academy treasury, I will add $5,000. If an earlier day is likely to prove as successful or more so, please substitute it. In all appeals keep my name out of sight; let it not go into any circulars or newspapers. Say a "friend" of the Academy, or use some equivalent. Of course I shall want the control and disposition of mine, as stated in my former communications; and let the subscribers appropriate their subscriptions to what purposes they please, if they have preferences. If I cannot pay my subscription on the precise day, it will come soon afterwards.

As the Sibley Fund altogether exceeds what I originally proposed, I wish to modify my gift by requiring that after my death and that of my wife, at least one third of the entire income shall be continually added to the principal (the remaining income being constantly appropriated to the support of students of poverty and merit under the condition I have formerly given, if there be so many students deserving of the charity) until the *entire* INCOME of the Sibley Charity Fund shall amount to at least twenty thousand dollars annually. After the annual income amounts to at least this sum, the principle of accumulation may be continued as before, and the surplus over the twenty thousand dollars may be used for the erection of a building or buildings, or for the payment of salaries, or for the support of more students, or for any other purposes which the Trustees may think the exigencies of the institution require.

Mrs. S. sends her compliments, retaining very pleasant recollections of your call.

Respectfully yours,

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
April 24, 1877.

ALBERT C. PERKINS, Esq.,
Principal of Phillips Exeter Academy.

DEAR SIR, — Herewith I send to the Treasurer of Phillips Exeter Academy a check for three thousand dollars, for the purpose of increasing the Sibley Charity Fund. I wish this gift to be held by the Trustees on the same terms and with the same limitations in every respect as if it had been part of the donation made by me 25 November, 1862. And I request that the whole of the income continue to be added to the principal during my life and that of my wife, unless I give different directions. Having thus alienated my right to this property, I wish to call the attention of the Trustees to the statement near the end of the communication in November, 1862, and to express my desire, if my wife Charlotte Augusta Langdon (Cook) Sibley, who concurs with me in making this donation, should survive me, that she may, by a written order over her own signature, draw for her own use as much of the income of the whole Sibley Charity Fund as she may wish.

As the Sibley Charity Fund altogether exceeds what I originally contemplated, I wish to modify the conditions of my gift (as in my communication I reserved to myself the right to do if I thought proper) by requiring that after my death and that of my wife, at least one half of the entire income shall continue to be added annually to the principal (the remaining income being constantly appropriated to the support of students of poverty and merit, under the conditions I have formerly given, if there be so many students deserving of the charity, or if not, to the necessary expenses of the Academy) until the *entire income* of the Sibley Charity Fund shall amount to twenty thousand dollars annually. After the annual income amounts to this sum, and so long as it continues to be so much, the principle of accumulation may be continued as before or not; and the surplus over the twenty thousand may be used for the erection of a building or buildings, or for the payment of salaries, or for the support of more students, or for any other purposes which the Principal and the Trustees may think the exigencies require.

Respectfully yours,

JOHN LANGDON SIBLEY.

This gift is to be kept a secret.

The Sibley Charity Fund now amounts to about forty thousand dollars. With reference to his connection with it, Mr. Sibley strongly insisted on the concealment of his name. It was with the utmost reluctance, and in the hope that his example might be followed by some of the richer alumni of the

Academy, that he consented to suffer the disclosure of the secret at the academic festival held in 1872 for the dedication of the new Academy building, and in celebration of a half-century's service of the principal, Gideon Lane Soule, LL.D. Dr. Palfrey, who presided at the table, made the announcement. Mr. Sibley, who was present, and had yielded only two or three hours before to the urgent solicitations of the Trustees, was forced upon his feet by shouts of applause, and in a speech of unsurpassed *naïveté*, pathos, and unstudied eloquence, with a modesty and a filial piety that disclaimed all praise for himself, and won from all who heard him the most reverent regard for his parents, told the story of his early life, of his native home, and of the patient and loving toil and sacrifice of those to whose memory the Sibley Fund is dedicated. Some of the incidents which he related indicated on his father's part an almost unprecedented surrender of his own imperative needs for his son's benefit. Thus he said that when he needed a Greek Lexicon, his father sent him the requisite sum, writing that though his eyesight had begun to grow dim, he thought that he could dispense with spectacles another year, and thus afford the cost of the book.

Meanwhile Mr. Sibley was not unmindful of the needs of other institutions of learning and of beneficence. He made a generous benefaction to Bowdoin College, and was always ready to render aid in any worthy educational enterprise. He repeatedly gave generous donations to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and was one of the largest contributors to the endowment of the Cambridge Hospital. In fine, he had always a ready ear and an open hand for deserving claims on his charity.

Mr. Sibley had, of course, written much for his Magazine, and had undoubtedly furnished articles for other uses; but his earliest independent publication was "A History of the Town of Union" (12mo, pp. 540), which appeared in 1851. This has the two essential requisites for such a work, accuracy and completeness. The geography of the town is so faithfully delineated that one might almost draw a map of it, with river, brook, and pond, from his description. The history goes back to the granting of the Waldo Patent, which included Union. The successive stages of its growth are indicated in numerical statistics as well as in words: we have, in full, lists of town

officers, and copies of all important votes and documents; the doings and misdoings of the mother church and its unruly members are recorded; the local zoölogy is not forgotten; and the genealogy of every family is given, with names and dates, and the occasional seasoning of a personal trait or anecdote. The work is so thorough and exhaustive that it could be enlarged only by being continued.

This, in great part a labor of love for his native town, gave hopeful presage, which was more than realized in the author's success on a much larger scale. How early he conceived the idea of the work which will perpetuate his name with honor while the College lasts, "Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University," we do not know; but the materials for it must have accumulated on his hands very rapidly from the time that he took charge of the Triennial of 1842. The first volume (large 8vo, pp. 618) appeared in 1873. While he was busily engaged on the second volume, he became aware that his eyesight was greatly enfeebled and obscured, and on his consulting an oculist it was found that cataract was forming on both his eyes. Operations for its removal were performed — for one eye in 1876, for the other in the following year — with entire success so far as surgical skill was concerned, yet without restoring to him such free use of his eyes as he needed for consulting manuscripts, ill-printed pamphlets, and the various often almost illegible sources from which he drew very largely for his sketches of life and character. He, however, hardly suspended his labor except while after each operation he was obliged to remain for some days in a darkened room. With his copious and orderly arranged notes, his retentive memory, and his intimate knowledge of the authorities to be consulted, and with the skilled and unceasing aid of his wife, who was both eyes and hands to him, he was able to make good progress in the forthcoming volume, which was issued (pp. 557) in 1881, and showed no traces of the physical infirmity and disability under which it had been prepared. With a somewhat improved condition of the eyes, yet with so restricted a use of them as would have discouraged a man of less strenuous purpose, he commenced the third volume. While engaged upon it, he was repeatedly interrupted, for weeks and even months, by severe attacks of painful illness, yet returned to his desk with every respite, and was able to

finish the volume (pp. 457) in the spring of 1885. His waning strength barely sufficed for the revision of the last proofs of this volume, which betrays no token of impaired mental vigor, and contains the most difficult of all the biographies, that of Cotton Mather, whose life-story is told with minute accuracy, without prejudice either favorable or adverse, and with full appreciation of his marvellous learning, industry, and fertility of mind. To his memoir is appended probably the most nearly complete list of Mather's publications that has ever been made, comprising four hundred and fifty-six titles, many of them with descriptive comments.

It is impossible to overestimate the worth of these volumes. They are entirely unique, so far as we know; and it might have seemed an utterly hopeless task to take the names of men as they stand in the Catalogue, and to assign to each of them his due place in the history of the College and of his time. Yet there is not one of them for whom this is not accomplished. As to some the facts ascertained are but few, and of no general interest; yet even they generally belonged to families still extant, and glad to learn something concerning those who bore their names two centuries and more ago. Others, and very many, were men who occupied a somewhat conspicuous position, ministers, magistrates, physicians, more or less distinguished, who were essential factors in the life of their time, and whose biographies, in themselves interesting, throw light on else obscure passages in the history of their towns or of the colony. Others still were men of acknowledged eminence, of whom, however, there are no fresh or easily accessible memoirs, and of whom Mr. Sibley tells all that one wants to know, in his own concise and perspicuous style, with the occasional interpolation of quaint extracts from their writings or those of their coevals.

The work could not have been better done, nor so well by any other man that we know, nor yet at a later time; for the memorials, written and traditional, of our colonial days are constantly dropping out of sight and out of mind, how rapidly in this fast age of ours few are aware. But the time is not far distant when these volumes will be the sole authority for many of their contents, and our posterity will bless the historiographer on whose authenticity they can place firm reliance.

The third volume closes with the Class of 1689. Mr. Sibley, as is well known, has made pecuniary provision for the continuance of these biographies, and has also left ample materials, in memoranda, letters, and documents, which will be at his successor's service. Nor is the task that remains to be compared, as to magnitude and difficulty, with that which has been performed. In the eighteenth century the New England press had become prolific, and the knowledge of men in public life, or of those belonging to families not extinct, can be obtained with a good degree of ease. But the earlier generations needed a master-hand to disinter their memories.

The last few months of Mr. Sibley's life were a season of debility and suffering, with few and brief intervals of relief. Until the late autumn he enjoyed short interviews with his friends, but was incapable of mental effort and of continuous thought. In the early summer there was a slight improvement, and he cherished a strong hope that he might be able to officiate as chorister in the singing of the seventy-eighth Psalm, to the tune of St. Martin's, at the Commencement dinner, — an office which he had filled for thirty-six successive years. But as the day approached, he became himself aware, as those about him had been previously, that such an effort was beyond his ability. From that time he was confined for the most part to his room, and gradually lost his hold on passing events and his interest in the outside world. The closing hour often seemed very near; but with a natively strong constitution, unimpaired by luxury, indulgence, or indolence, he resisted and overcame repeated paroxysms of disease that threatened an immediately fatal issue. His illness had every alleviation and comfort that could be afforded by the most assiduous, skilful, and loving care; and if death was ever thus kept at bay, it was so in his case for weeks and months. He died on the 9th of December, 1885.

In our estimate of Mr. Sibley's character, emphatic stress should be laid on his integrity, — we do not mean in the details that make up the common virtue of honesty, but in all the minutiæ of thought, word, and deed. He made rigid adherence to the truth and the right in the least things a matter of conscience. He would be lavish of time, and of money if need were, in determining an obscure date or the proper orthography of a name in which no person living would ever

detect a mistake, not from the pride of accuracy, but because he thought it wrong to state what he did not know, or to omit in any work that he undertook the full statement of all that he could ascertain. The same rigid truthfulness governed his speech in ordinary conversation. What he professed to know might always be regarded as authentic, and he was slow to surmise beyond his actual knowledge. In business transactions he was ready equally to claim and to give precisely what was due, except that he never urged a claim where it was the part of charity to yield it; and while he was unwilling ever to be a debtor, or to leave a bill unpaid for a single day, he was a willing and indulgent creditor, even while his own income was scanty and precarious.

He was thoroughly generous to every one but himself. There were those who for years depended on such subsidies as he gave them to eke out their slender means of subsistence. From his house and table poor homes and meagrely spread tables received liberal supplies. His hospitality was often extended for weeks and months to those who could not afford a home of their own. Without parade or ostentation he welcomed every occasion for doing good, and we doubt whether for the last forty years of his life there was ever a time when he did not spend more for others than for himself. It was characteristic of his lifelong habits, that he gave special directions that his funeral should be as simple and unexpensive as was consistent with propriety, and that the amount thus saved should be given to the poor. No man can ever have been more indifferent than he was to the possession of money. Not far from the period of his last donation to Phillips Exeter Academy, he put what property he had into the hands of a friend, under whose prudent care and skilful investments it increased very rapidly. But he never at any one time knew even approximately his own financial condition, and at the close of his life his was the rare case of one's having fully twice, perhaps three times the amount of property which he supposed himself to possess.

His beneficence, while not sparing in the bestowal of money, was by no means confined to almsgiving. He was applied to continually from all quarters for information on the subjects on which he was known to be of authority, and he was always ready to devote any amount of time and labor thus to serve a

person even wholly unknown to him, and that, too, when his own work was the most pressing and engrossing.

In his home-life he accounted himself, and not without ample reason, as pre-eminently happy; but while in the nearest of home-relations he was richly and signally blessed, he manifested such rare domestic virtues as to make it a marvel and a mystery that he postponed the opportunity for their exercise till so late a period of life. As a friend he was true and loyal, abounding in kind offices, yet with the seeming consciousness of receiving the very kindness that he bestowed. In dress, manners, appearance, and personal habits, he preserved to the last much of the simplicity and many of the unconventional ways of his rural birthplace and his early life; but there was in him the very soul of courtesy, and those who knew him best had often fresh surprises in his fineness and delicacy of feeling, his tenderness for the sensibility of others, and his choice of the modes of performing kind acts in which he could best keep himself in the background and ward off the painful sense of obligation. He can have had no enemies, while to very many who held him in dear regard he bequeaths a precious memory.

Mr. Sibley became a member of this Society in 1846, and at the time of his death was the sixth in seniority of membership. He was also a member of the Historic, Genealogical Society, and an honorary member of several historical societies in other States. He was for many years a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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